

Breakfast-Skippers Risk Iron Shortfall, Poorer Grades

- ★ Teens that start their day without breakfast are twice as likely to have diets low in iron, according to a study involving more than 700 ninth graders in Louisiana. Of the ninth graders studied, 19 percent skipped breakfast, including 20 percent of white and 36 percent of non-white girls. What's more, the diets of one in three breakfast dodgers had a significant iron shortfall – twice the rate of their breakfast eating peers.
- ★ That's a shortfall that could be hurting their grades. Iron-deficiency anemia has long been known to have a negative effect on behavior and learning. In one recent study, even marginal iron levels were linked to poorer math scores among adolescent girls. By contrast, other studies show eating breakfast can improve memory, grades, school attendance, and punctuality in children.
- ★ Teens that ate breakfast were two to five times more likely to consume at least two-thirds of the recommended amounts of most vitamins and minerals, including iron. Intakes of vitamins and minerals, including zinc, calcium, and folic acid, were much higher among the breakfast eaters, while fat consumption was lower. The nutrients teens miss when they skip breakfast are rarely recouped during other meals, according to the researcher, who published her results in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 2000 (volume 27, pp.314-321).
- ★ Girls, in particular, are at risk for low iron because they have increased needs. And while some teens skip breakfast to cut calories, this practice is rarely effective. Instead, research suggests that meal-skippers often eat more high-calorie, salty, and low-fiber snacks.



Adapted from MEALTALK: Desire Stapley, RD, LD, Food and Nutrition Information Center, National Agriculture Library, Beltsville, MD.

Studies show...

"Students who ate school breakfast often had math grades that averaged almost a letter grade higher than students who ate school breakfast rarely."

-- *Pediatrics*, Vol. 101 No.1, January 1998

School breakfast resulted in significant:

- Increases in math grades
- Decreases in student absences
- Decreases in student tardiness
- Decreases in ratings of psychosocial problems

Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School

"The Relationship of School Breakfast to Psychosocial and Academic Functioning"

<http://archpedi.ama-assn.org> (search "past issues" for 1998 vol. 152 no. 9)

http://www.findarticles.com/cf_0/m2250/n2_v37/20576437/p1/article.jhtml?term=psychosocial+functioning

"Children in the School Breakfast Program were shown to have significantly higher standardized achievement test scores than eligible non-participants."

-- Tufts University School of Nutrition Science and Policy, 1998

School breakfast resulted in:

- Increased math and reading scores
- Fewer nurse's office visits
- Improved classroom behavior
- Improved attentiveness reported by teachers
- Improved performance reported by parents

Minnesota Dept. of Children, Families and Learning & University of Minnesota

"School Breakfast Programs/Energizing the Classroom"

<http://cfl.state.mn.us/energize.pdf>

"Children who ate breakfast at school scored notably higher on most of the tests than children who ate breakfast at home and children who did not eat breakfast."

-- Archives of Pediatric & Adolescent Medicine, October, 1996

Students eating school breakfast resulted in:

- Higher scores on assessment tests
- Findings that support previous research
- Positive effects from eating breakfast in the classroom vs. the cafeteria

Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School

"Maryland Meals for Achievement"

www.msde.state.md.us/programs/foodandnutrition/mmfa.pdf

"The benefits [of the School Breakfast Program] include higher performance on standardized tests, better school attendance, lowered incidence of anemia, reduced need for costly special education."

-- Tufts University Center on Hunger, Poverty and Nutrition Policy, 1994